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“Moving Transportation in the Right Direction”

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Thank you very much for inviting me to speak at your annual public hearing. By your kind invitation, you have provided me with an opportunity to share my observations about how our public transit system, including PATH and PATCO, can serve as a framework for New Jersey’s unique Smart Growth policies and how that can lead to reduce reliance on the automobile. This discussion comes at a propitious time, because the administration of Governor

James McGreevey has thoroughly embraced Smart Growth principles. Now we need to think through carefully how our existing transportation assets and future investments can best be used to foster Smart Growth goals, such as urban revitalization and reduced rates of land consumption and increased transit ridership.

New Jersey has the potential to shape a unique Smart Growth strategy that could bend the trend on vehicle use and vehicle miles traveled. This would give our citizens choices in how they make many of their trips and improve our air quality. At the core of that strategy is an appreciation of the potential value of the already extensive rail and bus system in northern and central New Jersey and, to some extent, in southern New Jersey as well. With the opening of the Secaucus Transfer at year's end, we will be

substantially expanding the utility of our rail system:  
improving rail access to Midtown Manhattan from Bergen  
and Passaic counties, offering rail access to the  
Meadowlands for the first time, and, in the long run, most  
significantly, giving our citizens new opportunities for  
intra-state rail travel.

In the popular mind people often say our mass transit  
policy is failing us, because it doesn't directly affect the  
lives of many of us. I would argue that we are just  
beginning to understand how to shape that system -- and  
the environments surrounding it -- so that it can become  
relevant to the lives of more of our citizens. On its own  
terms, the system has been thriving over the past 20 or so  
years, since the inception of NJ TRANSIT. For example,  
on the Northeast Rail Corridor, New Jersey's rail "Main

Street,” ridership has grown 127 percent over the past 20 years. In an example of prudent investment that made transit more useful to people’s lives, almost 3,000 trips a day are now reaching or departing Newark Liberty International Airport through the successful new rail station connecting to the airport monorail. In addition, the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail Line is attracting noteworthy economic development to its station areas.

The principal reason why transit doesn’t affect the lives of many of our citizens is that our sprawling patterns of land investment and use pull origins and destinations away from the transit system and funnel travel onto our congested state highways and local roads. Were more of our activities spatially organized around transit, we would realize a

greater societal benefit from the public expenditures in the system than we now do.

The transportation component of Smart Growth is not yet fully developed in New Jersey, but this is our opportunity to make it far more robust. We need to recognize that land use decisions and investments are central to travel behavior. Certain facts should convince us that investment around transit and in compact walkable settlements works in reducing auto reliance. Here are a few of these facts:

- More than 60 percent of the New Jersey resident workers near Jersey City's transit hub on the Waterfront reach work by transit, walking or bicycle, and most of them like working there and also are satisfied with their trip to work.
- Meanwhile, an infinitesimal number of workers at most suburban office parks travel to work by anything

other than auto; and  $\frac{3}{4}$  of them travel, one-way, between 10 and 40 miles to work.

[This data is drawn from a survey from a to-be-published study conducted by the Voorhees Transportation Policy Institute.]

- Census data shows conclusively that people who live proximate to train stations use transit or walk for their work trip at a considerably higher rate than people living further away.
- Some 38 percent of the residents of Princeton Borough, a compact, traditional small town where residents and jobs are nearby to one another, walk or bike to work.
- Transit-oriented housing along the Hudson River Waterfront continues to expand to a dazzling rate.

- When NJ TRANSIT initiated Midtown Direct services on the Morris & Essex Line in 1996, providing one-seat service to a desirable destination, Penn Station New York, ridership quickly grew to 11,000 daily.

The cornerstones of New Jersey's Smart Growth transportation policy should be robust state commitments to:

- concentration of appropriate investment at infill sites near our train and bus stations, and
- to sound transit investment that makes the system ever more useful to our citizens

Such policies would result in increasingly changing the way New Jerseyans travel to work, recreation, services, shopping, universities and other destinations.

In other words, we will continue to discover that New

Jerseyans want mobility options and that their romanticized love affair with the auto is somewhat exaggerated.

I believe our greatest single leverage point is the location of new office investment. Decisions to locate jobs are more flexible and should be less personal than household decisions about where to live. As our data shows, workers generally enjoy working in urban settings accessible by transit from many corridors with plenty of restaurants and other services readily available. The Jersey City Waterfront experience tells us that locating jobs near transit hubs, giving most employees a choice of travel mode, will lead to high percentages of these New Jersey workers using public transit. As a bonus, if appropriate housing is nearby, some of those workers will locate there



and will walk and bike to work. This concept should be central to New Jersey's Smart Growth transportation policy.

Instead of just talking about these directions, or just taking half-way measures, now is the time to act decisively. The political commitment to Smart Growth provides momentum for us to leverage the public interest in Smart Growth. We must begin the debate about aggressive steps to engage local government and private developers to encourage and make investment in the right places -- near transit facilities and in a form that encourages non-motorized travel.

We have several challenges to overcome before we can cross the threshold into a less auto-reliant New Jersey.

First, we must first assure the continued vitality of our public transit system, that has been so improved over the past 25 years since the establishment of NJ TRANSIT. It should be kept affordable and be given sufficient funds to be maintained and prudently expanded so it can serve more of our citizens' travel needs. Unfortunately, this is easier to say than do, because various financial practices with state's transportation budgets have jeopardized our ability to keep the public transit system on an even keel.

I urge all Clean Air advocates to monitor the upcoming work of the Governor's Blue Ribbon Transportation Commission. That commission of distinguished leaders will be wrestling with this weighty question. Important choices will be placed before the Commission about how to

provide adequate funding for our public transit operations and maintenance. Choices will also have to be made about where any new capital dollars should be invested and what kind of promising transit expansion projects should be put into or kept in the pipeline. In that vein, we should be thinking about expanding the capacity of our rail “Main Street,” the Northeast Corridor, and redirecting our planning dollars for intra-New Jersey projects that connect urban neighborhoods to significant destinations and revive investor interest in those neighborhoods. To facilitate this kind of urban sub-regional transit, the state should expect to enter into planning partnerships with local governments.

The second challenge is to develop a bolder and workable approach to encouraging office and mixed use development at transit hubs, particularly in Jersey City, Newark,

Hoboken, Secaucus and Camden, and residential and retail development, or transit villages, at outlying suburban stations. This policy is benefited by the fact that train stations appear to be locations where the public is most amenable to higher densities.

We need several ingredients to make this work. One is a recognition by the development community and corporations that investment and location near transit stations is in their interest and in that of New Jersey.

Second, we need financial incentives, such as a Transit Development Action Grant program, to encourage appropriate transit-oriented developments. Safeguards must be included to assure that care is taken in evaluating the location and the type of development. We don't want

to promote this idea and end up with “transit-adjacent” development, as at Metro Park, where the land surrounding an important station is devoted mainly to offices and hotels and few of the workers or patrons use transit as their way of reaching these facilities.

Third, beyond making the financing more attractive, we must deal with developers’ trepidations that they will be wasting precious financial and human capital in difficult, drawn-out dealings with municipal governments whose personnel may only dimly understand Smart Growth concepts. We need to create the governmental capacity and know-how above the municipal level to educate local officials and assist them to shepherd good Smart Growth proposals for investment near transit stations.

Fourth, we must develop tools for blunting the adverse effect of the property tax system, because ratable hunger impels local officials to put offices near suburban stations (as in Metro Park) and scares them away from placing relatively dense housing where it belongs - on top of seas of parking at outlying stations.

And fifth, we may also need to increase NJ TRANSIT's development powers. They are very limited today. That agency has the strongest institutional stake in seeing these policies work.

One other note. We need an honest, open debate between environmentalists and transit advocates about park-ride policy. For a transit system to work, we need to get people to stations. In our suburbanized landscape the park-ride has

been the obvious solution. Environmentalists, concerned about “cold starts”, bridle at the notion and have promoted station shuttle systems. We need to establish a policy, after open discussion, that balances these concerns and assures the broadest access to the system we can afford.

In summary, then

- If we placed more of our offices at transit hubs,
- If we built more of our residences close to train stations or ferries with high quality services,
- If we laid out more of our settlements, so that people had the travel option to walk or bike,
- If we ultimately connected the transit system to more destinations of interest to our citizens, and
- If we made access to the system feasible,

we would have a robust Smart Growth transportation policy that would have the promise to reduce our future reliance on the automobile and, thereby, clean our air.

Thank you for your time.